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THE REFORM MOVEMENT IN CHICAGO

By HOYT KING,

Secretary Legislative Voters' League, and formerly Secretary Municipal
Voters' League.

Chicago does not wish to become boastful, but she can truthfully say that the wave of municipal reform which has spread to other cities recently, started in Chicago in 1896, and has been persistently sweeping things before it and growing in strength ever since. We had some reform fits in earlier years; for instance, we sent a half dozen or so County Commissioners to Joliet penitentiary, and drove others to Canada, but that was a mere incident. Then the County Board was reformed and high class citizens served on it for a while and the finance system of the county was revised and made safer, and we have a better County Board to-day. While Minneapolis was indicting her mayor and chief of police, and Folk, of St. Louis, was after his boodle councilmen and legislators, we could look at our council with some pride and reflect that we started in on our work early and did not have any big boodling. Franchise grabbing was the center of corruption before 1896. A substantial investment in a campaign by a candidate for alderman with boodle inclinations was considered a good business venture. Perhaps it was, temporarily, but seven campaigns of the Municipal Voters' League have shown that boodling in politics does not pay.

The league is a non-partisan organization. Under direction of the Executive Committee, facts concerning the candidates and their records are published. The simple scheme of presenting facts, was originated by George E. Cole, first president and organizer of the Municipal Voters' League. The independent vote is now guided by this information, and in many wards the better of two men is almost sure of election, regardless of politics. Of the bad men in the saddle in 1896, just three remain, reinforced by some of the old "gray wolves" who had served prior to that year and who broke

in again later. But unless these "gray wolves" are big politicians, and by that is meant, unless they control the delegates of a ward or two for city convention purposes, business is very dull for them in the new council. If they control such delegates, however, they may be allowed the gambling graft or profit from bay window and sign post permits. These are sources of a considerable revenue in certain wards.

But on the whole boodling has not paid in Chicago. Men who strutted around, flushed with drink, who wore large diamonds in a striped shirt front, and perhaps a Prince Albert coat over a white waistcoat as an emblem of statesmanship, are now serving in modest clerical positions in the city or county government. They must live. They are lucky if they have this means of sustenance, and it is to be expected that the inclination to graft, strong in them from their brief council experience, leads them to make a little something over the salary of the new positions. But others, and they were the wise ones, went back to their little shops or stores; still others are keeping saloons or tending bar; one, who was at one time reputed to be wealthy, has been seen tramping the streets penniless.

There were several reforms in the laws at about the time the Municipal Voters' League work commenced, that have had much to do with enabling the reform of the council to be brought about. The salary of aldermen was raised from three dollars a week to fifteen hundred dollars a year. The Civil Service law had just been passed when the fight on the council began. It has gradually changed the system in the City Hall completely. In the old days, the offices that had patronage to dispense were crowded with applicants and their political backers, who were generally the aldermen. The aldermen do not now feel called upon to devote so much time to the job hunters, but rather take refuge behind the Civil Service law. It relieves them of a very unpleasant detail, and gives them time for committee work. The mayor, chief of police and other department heads are likewise relieved by the Civil Service law and there is a great deal more attention paid to department business now than there was in the old days.

The new aldermen are quite different from the old in personal appearance, as well as in their methods and morality. The proprietor of a saloon and gambling house was long with them, but he was deposed from control of the finance committee and he no

longer dictates the make-up of the other committees. The new aldermen are substantial business men, ordinary looking business men, honest men who are not business men, maybe mechanics or small tradesmen, all of them serious, devoting to council work the same attention they would to other business, analyzing conditions, criticising, correcting. They have studied street railways from every standpoint, in Chicago and abroad, and are prepared to deal directly with the most astute lawyers and practical railway men on this subject. They have inaugurated and are pushing a system of small parks for the promotion of which they got a bill through the Legislature. A year ago they investigated dishonesty in the departments, a committee, with Alderman Ernst F. Herrmann at its head, sitting almost daily and hearing testimony.

So jealous is the City Council of its reputation that at a special meeting Saturday afternoon, December 17th, the following resolution against one of its members was adopted by a vote of fifty-five to five:

"**WHEREAS**, On December 5, 1904, in debate upon the floor of this council, Alderman Hubert W. Butler made the following charges, attacking the integrity of the membership of this body:

"That certain lawyers in the council will do for clients what they will not do for themselves.

"That a certain element in the council want to show what they can do in the traction situation in connection with the ordinance; and

"*Whereas*, At the council meeting held on December 12, 1904, said Hubert W. Butler, in retracting such charges, declared they had been made without warrant and were without foundation in fact; and

"*Whereas*, Such admission shows an attempt to destroy the reputation of members of this body by deliberate mendacity; therefore be it

"*Resolved*, That the sergeant-at-arms be and he is hereby directed, in accordance with the rules of this council, to cause the said Hubert W. Butler to vacate his seat and come before the bar of the council and receive censure from the chair. . . ."

The chair (Mayor Harrison) directed the sergeant-at-arms to cause Alderman Butler to vacate his seat and come before the bar of the council, where he censured him as follows:

"Alderman Hubert W. Butler, the City Council of the city of Chicago, of which you are a member, finds you guilty of deliberate and malicious false statements, attacking the integrity and reputation of your colleagues, and in so finding declares said statements unworthy of a member of this body. Your long service in this council, the superior educational advantages which you

have enjoyed, and your great experience in parliamentary debate and practice renders your offense against the common decencies of public life the greater and the more inexcusable. Your statements have been published broadcast throughout the country and have done incalculable damage to the city of Chicago and the body of which you are a member. The unwarranted and unjustified slanders of which you have been guilty might have seriously affected the confidence of the public in this body, and have greatly impaired its capacity to do the work with which it is charged, and which it has honestly sought to accomplish. Your colleagues, by the adoption of this resolution, spread upon the records of this council their utter condemnation of the motives that impelled you to attempt deliberately to besmirch the reputation of your fellow members. You will now withdraw from the bar of the council."

A careful investigation in committee had failed to show any ground for Alderman Butler's charge.

When one dwells upon the work of the Municipal Voters' League of Chicago, he is dwelling on only one phase of reform work in that community. Reform is organized here. So much so, that letters are received from citizens all over the United States inquiring into the methods and accomplishments of the Municipal Voters' League, the Legislative Voters' League and the Citizens' Association. Because of this triple arrangement, reform work seems split up. Why, we are asked, do you have a Municipal Voters' League fighting to keep boodlers out of the council, and a Legislative Voters' League doing a similar work for the Legislature, and then a Citizens' Association unearthing evidence and prosecuting to indictment and conviction those boodlers who do break into office. Why is not all this done by one organization? Our answer is that there is a limit to the capacity for work of any one group of men. There are other reasons, but that is good enough. But the organizations work together nevertheless. The tabulated information collected by each is shared by the others. The same class of men make up the executive committees, different individuals, but they are all one in sentiment. To a large extent, the same contributors support the work of all three organizations. These are the wealthy business men, the bankers, if you please, who sometimes rest under the unjust stigma of being financially interested in boodling. They suffer this stigma much the same as the lawyers suffer for the shysters and pettifoggers in their midst. There are crooked bankers and financiers and then there are a great many more good

ones. The chairman of the committee that started the Municipal Voters' League was a bank president, and its first treasurer was a bank president, and so is its present one. The first chairman of its Finance Committee was a loan broker and the second a bank president. In no instance, it can be fairly stated, has the fact that a subscription was paid, been used to influence the action of the organizations. Insidious influences and attempts to get modifications of the leagues' positions generally come from so-called reformers, not from our wealthy citizens.

And this leads us to say that not only are a majority of our successful representative citizens in Chicago honest and patriotic, but they are reinforced by the great majority comprising the middle class. And this condition politically is true throughout the United States. The trouble is not in the sin of commission, but in the sin of omission, of indifference, of laziness, if you please, but not corruption. The interest of 85 per cent. of the voters is in the direction of honest, economical government. Take all those professional politicians, camp followers, promoters, contractors, criminals and gamblers, who profit by corruption in government or lax enforcement of law, and they probably do not exceed 15 per cent. of the population. This 15 per cent. is permitted to dominate the 85 per cent. because it is compact, well drilled and persistent, held together by the one binding tie, the hope of gain.

We are sometimes asked what is the information desired by these organizations for reform and how do they get it; where do they go. The Citizens' Association is a good starting point. It has been in business since 1874, when it started in with Franklin MacVeagh as its first president. It has made investigations since that time. It has preserved the record. It can tell you who is in the public service, what different political offices or jobs he has held, and what his different positions in the political organizations have been. If he has been in a legislative body, you will be handed the records of the proceedings of that body and a box of newspaper clippings commenting on the work of that body at that particular time or session. If he has held an administrative office, either elective or appointive, it will hand you a box of newspaper clippings concerning the administration of that office while he was head of it. No wonder officials are squeamish about newspaper comment. **Newspaper comment preserves a record and the people are given**

that record to review every time a disreputable candidate presents himself. The people do not have to remember, with the leagues to keep them posted. Formerly the politicians laughed at newspaper comment and said, "What do we care what they say now. The people's memory is only three months long. We have a chance to make good at the end of our term."

But to resume as to the methods of getting facts. The newspaper comment must be verified. It is only a starter. The investigation leads to new disclosures and facts. If the candidate has never been in the public employ, he must be investigated just as a business man would investigate the credit of a new customer. His neighbors and business men in his locality must be asked for their opinions; whether they think well or ill of him; if ill, why? There is a reason. Run it down and maybe you land on a penitentiary record or find a record that would have resulted in a penitentiary sentence if influence had not interfered. These leagues have such data. Sometimes they do not use ammunition of this kind. The men do not seek renomination, or seeking it, are defeated with less use of powder. The heavy artillery is not brought into play.

One of the greatest works of the Citizens' Association is the seeing to it that the criminal acts of politicians are made matters of record. This is accomplished by presenting facts to the Grand Jury, following George E. Cole's idea in his Municipal Voters' League campaigns, of dealing in facts. Having branded the crook, his political future is looked after by the leagues. It is a great system. George E. Cole took up the work of the Citizens' Association after retiring from the Municipal Voters' League, and in one year placed beyond the pale of politics three county civil service commissioners, two town collectors and a town supervisor, besides collecting data about innumerable deputies and other town officers. This material is all accessible when the men aspire to become statesmen. These men were all grafters in one way or another. Very recently the association, under the leadership of Louis A. Seeberger, president, and Shelby M. Singleton, secretary, dug into the health department and very nearly cleaned out all the plumbing inspectors. To break these barnacles loose, protected as they were by their superiors, it was necessary to prove the acceptance of bribes. This was done before the Grand Jury and five men were indicted. Afterwards the head of the department, Health Commissioner Reynolds,

was compelled to suspend others on the mere charge of incompetency and neglect of duty. That charge is generally sufficient to reach a graftor, for without neglect of duty there can be no graft. An important feature of the association's work consists in compelling a better enforcement of law by bringing pressure to bear upon negligent officials. By persistent efforts in this direction it has during the last year practically wiped out the 1,200 policy shops that formerly took \$5,000,000 a year from the poor of the city.

The Citizens' Association inspired the organization of the Legislative Voters' League. The latter organization was organized at an annual meeting of the Citizens' Association in 1901. Rollin A. Keyes, aided by Murry Nelson, William Kent, and a few business men, was responsible for a program which caused conditions in the Illinois Legislature to be placed before the public by Judge Lawrence Y. Sherman and Samuel Alschuler. They addressed the association on the subject. The evening's work resulted in the formation of a committee composed of Rollin A. Keyes, Judge Murray F. Tuley, Murry Nelson, John H. Hamline, Edward B. Butler, John V. Farwell, Jr., J. Harry Selz, A. C. Bartlett, Richard M. Bissell and George E. Cole. This committee organized the league by electing an Executive Committee and placing George E. Cole at its head, taking him away from the Citizens' Association. The league proceeded in its first campaign along the same lines as the Municipal Voters' League, disregarding party lines, collecting facts, preparing records and presenting them to the public. It was hampered somewhat by the fact that a Republican United States Senator was retiring and the Legislature was to elect a successor. This raised a party issue. Again it encountered this condition; in some districts, only three candidates are nominated, two by one party and one by the other. All three are elected because a district is entitled to three representatives, and the voter has no choice. When an independent comes in it breaks the combination. The league was obliged to go outside of the party lines in some instances on account of these combinations and put up independents to oppose bad candidates. It elected three of these independents. They ranked among the able men of the Legislature. One was Oliver W. Stewart, the prohibition organizer, leader and orator. Clarence S. Darrow, prominent in labor circles and attorney for the miners in the settlement of their difficulties in the anthracite district, was another. John J.

McManaman, a young attorney, was the third. Besides there were a great many excellent men elected on the party tickets.

These men went down to Springfield in 1903 and contended with the same conditions, with which the reform aldermen had contended when the complexion of the council was just changing. They met in committees with venal men chosen from the lowest walks of life, who were there for the sole purpose of blackmail. The blackmailers did not conceal their motives. The speaker of the house who assigned them these "good" committees knew their purposes. It was their political reward for supporting the speaker's election. It was the same old program, at one time followed in the council; the crooks were standing together, firmly organized, and putting up a strong game of bluff, intending to call down the corporations. But the end of this régime was sudden, startling, unheard of in the history of American states and magnificent in its result. Reform did not wait for another election. The crooks had gotten into the saddle through greater experience and astuteness, but they carried things too far and with too high a hand.

One day in April, after weeks and weeks of fighting with an unfriendly and arbitrary speaker, bad committees and bad floor leaders, the honest majority was stung to action. Almost as one man its members moved on the speaker and drove him and his little band of law breakers from the house and reorganized it, and then proceeded to undo all the organization had done, and undo it in an orderly and parliamentary way. Of course it was not legal, but it was effective. It created a public sentiment in favor of honest men who had the nerve to use physical force to preserve the dignity and sanctity of the Legislature. The decent newspapers listed the names of these ninety-seven out of a total of one hundred and fifty-three members and put them on a roll of honor. And although these men allowed the regular organization to resume peaceably, the decent members ran things after that. The house organization did as it was told and it was told only that the constitution of the State of Illinois must prevail and the members be allowed their constitutional rights.

This happy outcome was forced, by the fight to pass the so-called traction bill, a bill to enable cities to own and operate their street railways. Chicago was particularly interested in legislation of this kind. Its principal street railway grants were about to expire

under the terms of the ordinances, but the companies were claiming a longer term under an ancient act of the Legislature. The people of Chicago were determined to get rid of these claims as a condition of new franchise ordinances; and in such new ordinances to reserve the right of municipal purchase at or before the expiration of the franchises. The original ordinances themselves, which it was claimed the legislative act had extended, contained provisions for municipal purchase, but the city was without legal authority to exercise this right. With such authority, it was obvious that in the approaching negotiations with the companies the city would be in a far better position to protect its rights and make valuable reservations for the future. Nevertheless, it was openly claimed that a Cook County politician of influence and the editor of an organization newspaper had asserted that there would be no traction legislation at this session. It was believed by some that the street railway companies, especially those formerly controlled by Charles T. Yerkes, desired the defeat of any bill that would really give the city the power it desired and needed. A carefully prepared and conservative bill for municipal ownership, drawn by Walter L. Fisher, secretary of the Municipal Voters' League, and introduced by Senator Mueller, was backed by Chicago's mayor and aldermen, the reformers and many prominent citizens. It had passed the senate and was before the house. The dominant political faction in control of the house, owned by the machine leaders like the editor above referred to, sought first to kill the Mueller bill and then to substitute for it a sham bill conferring no effective power on the city.

The members were roused to white heat over the methods pursued by the organization to suppress fair consideration of these measures. Mayor Carter H. Harrison and many of Chicago's best aldermen were on the floor. Graeme Stewart, Harrison's opponent for mayor, and John M. Harlan, Stewart's rival for the Republican nomination, were there. Judges, representatives of the Municipal Voters' League and the Legislative Voters' League and many citizens of Chicago were occupying seats about the lobbies awaiting developments. The excitement was intense.

A little committee of four members of the house, representing the two great parties and factions within the parties, brought together by the Legislative Voters' League, had been debating nightly over the methods to be pursued to secure fair play in considering

the bills. Representatives of this committee had waited upon the speaker to ask if he would allow members their constitutional right to roll calls and to recognition on the floor. His answers had been non-committal and evasive. Unfair exercise of the speaker's power was anticipated. Day by day the little committee grew in numbers till just before the battle, it included over half the membership of the house. Practically all the Cook County Democrats and all the Cook County Republicans (except the strict organization men) together with the three independents and some members outside of Cook County, joined in the determination to secure their constitutional rights. Force was openly advocated in the meetings of this voluntary steering committee. No peaceful method of securing those rights could be advanced by the shrewdest lawyers or most experienced politicians. Many advised that physical force was the only remedy against the violation of the constitution and plain rights of the members. Mandamus could not correct the journal. Criminal prosecution was deemed inexpedient and of doubtful success.

On this memorable day, true to prediction, the crisis came. In dead silence, at noon, when the business of the morning had been disposed of, the reputed author of the organization's measure rose. He offered his bill as a substitute for the Mueller bill desired by the Chicago City Council. Pandemonium broke loose. Fifty members were on their seats and on desks demanding a roll call. Five would be entitled to it on demand, under the constitution. In the face of this demand, the speaker's lips were seen to move, the gavel to go up and come down and it was known that the substitution had been made, and the organization had done its work. Holding the floor, the organization leader moved in rapid succession six amendments to his bill so substituted and six times the gavel was seen to fall in the face of an ever-increasing tumult of cries for "roll call, roll call." Women filled the seats back of the speaker, too frightened to move in the face of the mob demanding their retirement. The most dignified members were in a frenzy and only held in check by the presence of the ladies behind the speaker, placed there, it was suspected, for this purpose. But when the last act of arbitrary power had been exercised, with one accord, the majority, already on its feet, made a spontaneous move toward the speaker's chair. In an instant, a struggling, maddened crowd of members

were battling on the right of the speaker in an attempt to seize him and they were prevented only by the political henchmen of the organization paid to wear titles as janitors and policemen. All this time, the Western Union wires were hot with dispatches to the Chicago newspapers, and pencils and typewriters were doing double duty that day to pave the way for the startling headlines that must appear in the extra afternoon papers on the streets of Chicago.

But the speaker escaped. He did not run perhaps, but his movement was not deliberate. He retired with as much dignity as great haste permitted him to assume, and left on that side where the disorder was least and between a double row of house policemen. It was some hours before he was again seen. The house members remaining in session (ninety-six of the one hundred and fifty-three) did not at first intend that he should return without the state militia as an escort. They prepared to and did organize the house. As soon as the turmoil had ceased, a representative, after many efforts, made himself heard. He was not heard till it was known that his object was friendly, and then to make a motion to elect a temporary speaker in the absence of the regularly elected speaker. A clerk, a doorkeeper and a sergeant-at-arms were duly elected and by this time, order being restored, the house proceeded to business as though nothing had happened. As already stated the work of the organization was undone, and what was transacted at this rump meeting was afterwards in substance duly repeated in regular session and became embodied in the laws of the state. And thus the people got their bill for municipal ownership, but they gained something a great deal more important than the bill. They had demonstrated that deep down in the public body is a spirit that will not brook anarchy and defiance of law, that when all other means fail anarchy will be met by force and the law sustained. It was a great victory for reform and it will be many a day before the constitution will be trampled on in the Legislature of Illinois.

The effect of the league's campaign was wholesome. When the session of 1903 closed, it was able to commend the records of twenty-seven of the forty-five retiring Cook County members. Only nine retiring members of the previous session had good records. The league condemned on their records nineteen Cook County members of last body as against twenty-five bad ones retiring two years ago. One of the worst and oldest in service in the house, who had crept

in by a greatly reduced majority, quit the field. The two campaigns have revolutionized the house. The improvement is not due so much to the changed character of the men composing the body as it is to an awakened public sentiment which demands honest, capable service.

The house of 1905 is now in session. It has been organized on wholly different lines from the former. It is in control of the very element that finally overrode the speaker two years ago. It has for speaker a man who in the last session made his reputation as a fair and impartial presiding officer over the Judiciary Committee, the one committee of the house that was conducted on parliamentary lines and whose work was open and above board. The Senate is presided over by Judge Lawrence Y. Sherman, now lieutenant-governor, who, with his followers, lead the revolt in the previous session of the house.

One of the first acts of the new house was to defeat the iniquitous pay-roll, an abuse that has grown to startling proportions. The mere fact that roll calls would be allowed, enabled the league to bring about this reform. In Illinois the General Assembly is entitled by law to seventy-three employees, whose daily compensation amounts in total to a little over \$200. This daily expense has been increased by leaps and bounds until at the last session it grew to over \$900 a day. It was the practice of the both houses, on the first day, to authorize an expenditure for this purpose of \$100,000 for the session, and then the Senate, House and Secretary of State proceeded to pack the pay-roll with henchmen of the members. Many of those who drew pay never came to Springfield at all. Yet there appeared on the rolls of the last Legislature some 364 names under various titles. Of these, ninety-three were labeled janitors and seventy policemen. All this was exposed by the league in a clearly written bulletin and mailed this year to every member and to the newspapers over the state. The newspapers took it up and the league then proceeded to organize a fight within the Legislature to defeat the customary resolutions to authorize additional appointments over the statute, with the result that a greatly reduced quota of extra employees has been agreed upon.

This successful fight of the Legislative League should result in a biennial saving of \$75,000 to the state as well as in wiping out an iniquitous system that corrupts and pollutes all who participate in it.

The sensation of the present session has been the expulsion by the house of one of its own members, Mr. Frank B. Comerford. On January 27th last, Mr. Comerford, a newly elected member and a young man of thirty, charged in an address before a law school, "That the Illinois Legislature is a great public auction, where special privileges are sold to the highest corporation bidders."

Upon this statement becoming public, a committee of seven was appointed by resolution of the house to investigate the charges. On February 8th the committee reported that the charges were not sustained by any evidence that would affect the integrity of the present house or any member, and a resolution for expulsion was offered. It was adopted by a vote of 121 to 13.

Speaker Shurtleff rose; the house was in dead silence. He hesitated a moment:

"Will the gentleman from Cook," he began. Mr. Comerford rose.

The speaker began again: "Will Mr. Comerford please retire from the floor of the house?"

"I will, Mr. Speaker," instantly responded Mr. Comerford, and walked down the aisle and out of the chamber.

"The clerk is instructed to strike the name of Frank D. Comerford from the rolls of the house," announced the speaker, and this ended the formalities.

And this completes the story of the political uplift that began in the Chicago City Council and has now reached the Illinois Legislature. The events of the last two sessions have startled the state and concentrated public attention on the people's law making body. The revolt of last session was the death struggle of the old régime. The action of the present house in expelling Mr. Comerford is the assertion of its self respect. The House of Representatives of to-day is the best Illinois has had since the Civil War.